

A PLACE OF RITUAL ON THE WESTERN SHORES OF LAKE TAUPO

D.R. SIMMONS

AUCKLAND INSTITUTE AND MUSEUM

Abstract. A place of ritual, burial mound and "Uenuku" marker posts are reported from the western shore of Lake Taupo.

On a Maori land block on the west shore of Lake Taupo there is a natural amphitheatre in the hills. It consists of a plateau bounded in a semicircle by low hillocks with a moderate slope leading down on the open side. The natural access way is by a stream bed on the south side leading to a break in the hillocks allowing access to the rear of the amphitheatre. The area enclosed is approximately two hectares. The semicircle is open to the east and is well positioned for the rising sun to shine directly into the central area.

The place was brought to notice by the Maori Trustees of the block who planned to remove the low scrub and replace it with pasture. A pair of posts on a low mound to one side of the centre were discovered and reported to the Department of Maori Affairs and Auckland Institute and Museum. More recently the New Zealand Historic Places Trust has been consulted.

These posts resemble the post figure "Uenuku tuwhatu" in the Te Awamutu Museum (Fig.1). This latter post symbolises the tribal god of the Waikato tribes. It is a *taumata atua* or resting place of the god who is said to have brought the Tainui canoe to Kawhia.

I visited the area on the west shore of Lake Taupo and found that the two posts stood on a mound about three metres long by two metres wide and *ca.* 40 cm high (Fig.2). The mound itself is somewhat pear-shaped and the posts stand near the wider end. One post has lost its front portion but is still upright (Figs.3-5), the other has lost the back portion and lies on the ground (Fig.6). Both posts are badly weathered and covered in lichen and at some stage have been damaged by fire. It is difficult to judge their original size as the portion of the post still standing is just over 1 m high. The robustness of the curving top would suggest that the original post stood about 2 m above the mound with about a half metre, or about the height of the mound, below soil level. Uenuku in Te Awamutu Museum stands 2.67 m high. There are no obvious signs of metal tool working although the weathered state precludes certainty on this point.

Photographs of the posts (Figs.2-6) were shown to knowledgeable *kaumatua* who were able, not only to identify their purpose but also, to name the area in which they stood. The elders consulted were Hemi Te Riria, Te Hape Tamihana, Emere Hape Te Rauna and Materoa Ngarimu Tamihana who belong to the *ariki* (paramount) lines of Tuwharetoa, Tuhoë, Ngati Kahungunu and Ngati Porou.

For cultural reasons, this image
has been removed.
Please contact Auckland
Museum for more information.

Fig. 1. "Uenuku tuwhatu" the god symbol in Te Awamutu Museum. No. 2025. Height 267 cm.

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Fig. 2 The standing burial post and mound viewed from the east. Note the shallow quarry trench in the foreground which delineated the mound.

The amphitheatre is named as *Te Tupapara o Te Koroiti ko Tama* and is a ceremonial centre of very great antiquity dedicated to the *Koroiti Ko Tama*, the ultimate life force (Binney 1968:172; 1982). *Te Tupapara o Te Koroiti Ko Tama* is a natural area which was not marked by any structure, a not unusual occurrence (Best 1924:170). Some centres association with the *tohi* rites for a *tohunga* of the Koroiti are marked with three unworked stones. There was such a centre near Punuruku in Northland. The stones have been removed now and are placed at the gate of the Punuruku primary school. In the *tupapara* at Taupo the stones were not located in the scrub but should have been in a triangle with the apex to the rising sun at the centre of the area opposite the open side. The mound on which the posts are situated is sited to the right hand side; it is thus to the south of where the stones should be, remembering that the amphitheatre opens to the east.

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Figs. 3-6. 3. The standing post viewed from the side. 4. The top of the standing post. 5. The standing post viewed from the front with the top of the second post lying at the base. 6. The top of the fallen post lying against the base of the standing post.

The posts are burial markers recording the resting place of Tutanekai Taniwha, the son of Tuwharetoa. Tutanekai was a *poriro* or bastard as his mother was Rangijuru, wife of Whakauekaipapa, ancestor of the Arawa tribe of Ngati Whakaue (Grace 1959:107). Tuwharetoa was an important and powerful *ariki* and Rangijuru belonged to an important family line. These factors, combined with his prowess as a leader, led to his recognition as an *ariki* despite the circumstances of his birth. The interment of Tutanekai in *Te Tupapara o Te Koroiti Ko Tama* is a recognition of this position. The posts mark the *taniwha* line of *ariki* descent, the *teina* line superseded only by the *tuakana* line itself. The placing of Tutanekai and the erection of the mound and markers was made some time after his death and was a secondary interment. Tutanekai himself lived some twelve to thirteen generations ago. The post markers have probably been replaced during that time. The present set seem to be pre-European and are stated by the elders to have been put up 'long before the Pakeha came'

Some five generations after Tutanekai's burial, Makaturangi, a female descendant of Tutanekai, was placed in the same mound. Makaturangi was an ancestress of Pirihita Pateriki of Tuhoë. A further burial in the mound was Tuwaikapu, either at this time or a little later. These latter burials are probably in the portion of the mound which does not contain the posts, the narrow end. It is unlikely that even an *ariki tohunga* would wish to disturb the remains of Tutanekai.

The conservator of the Auckland Museum has recently cleaned and restored the gateway of Pukeroa pa, Ohinemutu (Fig.7). According to museum records, this is the gateway that looked out Mokoia Island, the meeting place of Hinemoa and Tutanekai. The figure depicted is identified as Tutanekai.

Two further 'Uenuku' posts are known to have existed. They are named as *Makatororangi* and *Te Arikiniupaihi*. These posts stood in Ngati Kahungunu and Ngati Maniopoto territory respectively in Hawke's Bay and the King Country.

Discussion

The place of ritual for the *Koroiti Ko Tama* on the west shore of Lake Taupo is similar to the centre mentioned for the Ngati Wai tribal area at Punuruku. There were similarly orientated natural places marked by three stones in other tribal areas. Unfortunately once the stones are removed only local tradition can identify the exact place. During the last century, stones and other associated markers were often buried so that no physical trace now remains. In the *ariki* ritual places, burials of importance on the male descent line were put to the right-hand side (south), lesser burials derived from a female line were placed to the left, i.e. north. Burials in such places are rare and were only made as a mark of special distinction. Ultimately such favours reflected political attitudes of the time.

The use of 'Uenuku' type posts to mark the burial of Tutanekai is an acknowledgement of his status and of the importance of descent through the *tuakana* lines of Tainui. The number of 'spikes' on the top and their design is a device to convey genealogical information, while the form identifies descent on the 'Taniwha' lines of Tainui. It is the information conveyed by the posts that enabled certain identification of the burial to be made by the *kaumatua* and once this was accomplished, naming the place was a fairly simple matter.

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Fig. 7. The Pukeroa gateway depicting Tutanekai, photographed at Ohinemutu c. 1860, when it had been re-erected and the opening enlarged. (Note tattoo on the right cheek. The penis has been removed.) AM 160. Height, 380 cm overall.

Photo:Burton Bros

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